

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

## Building and Construction Industry Inquiry

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**Submission no:** 49

**Received:** 15/01/2004

**Submitter:** Mr Chris Dennis  
Queensland State Manager

**Organisation:** Higgins Coatings Pty Ltd

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62 Bishop Street  
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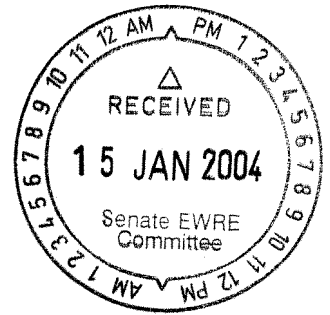
**Fax:** 07 3552 8399

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*Better painting management*



Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2003

The Secretary,  
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations & Education References Committee,  
Suite SG.52 Parliament House,  
**CANBERRA, ACT 2600.**

Attention: Mr J Carter

Dear Sir,,

**Re: Senate Inquiry – Building & Construction Industry.**

As previously advised in my letter I now enclose my statement in relation to the above inquiry.

Yours Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Chris Dennis". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Chris Dennis  
Queensland State Manager..

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## STATEMENT OF CHRIS DENNIS

I, CHRIS DENNIS of Higgins Coatings Pty Ltd, 2/62 Bishop Street, Kelvin Grove, Queensland state:


1. I am the State Manager of Higgins Coatings Queensland and have been in that capacity for over three years. Before that I worked in Victoria in a senior management role for the same company for a number of years. I have been employed in the construction industry in various roles for over 20 years, and before Higgins Coatings, I worked for other painting companies in Victoria being Opat and Programme Maintenance Services.
2. Higgins Coatings is a painting contracting company who works in the building construction industry in all markets from commercial repaints to new work on new buildings.
3. Higgins Coatings currently employs around 40 people which can go up and down depending on the work, and we currently have 8 office staff and management people and 5 group apprentices.
4. We have worked on projects such as the Suncorp Metway Stadium, the Gold Coast Convention Centre, and have worked for clients such as Mirvac, Watpac, Multiplex, FKP, Theiss, Matrix, and Sommer & Staff (in no particular order).
5. We have a current Certified Agreement with the union, which we recently signed towards mid-2003.
6. I had a very major influence in the negotiations in this agreement because I was involved as part of a Steering Committee set up by the Board of the Master

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SHEET 1

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CHRIS DENNIS

  
Witness

Monday, 12 January 2004

Painters Association Queensland to represent the major painting companies in the painting industry in respect of the new EBA for our industry. I can state that we worked through a series of claims over a number of months and the CFMEU had their own claim and were able to reach an agreement with the CFMEUQ. It was not the easiest path and took a good six months, but a reasonable settlement was achieved for both parties.

7. For example, one of the sticking points which was critically important to us was the repaint area, where we needed relief in respect to what was paid in that sector. To be able to compete with other smaller companies in that market who pay whatever they like or do not pay a lot of workers their rightful entitlements. I can state that after a number of months we were able to get resolution of that important issue and received some relief and were able to finalise an agreement for our industry.

#### **INDUSTRY PROBLEMS**

8. One of the major problems in our industry, and I believe there is three of them: The first one is Compliance and that many companies in our industry can't pay their workers their minimum entitlements such as superannuation, redundancy, overtime, annual leave, all those entitlements that the workers in our industry should receive. However, the union on the majority of occasions has to chase on behalf of those workers, their entitlements and keep many of those employers/contractors honest.
9. The second one that I see with the industry is the Occupational Health and Safety in our industry in that many jobs are pushed where there is a lack of manpower and because jobs are becoming behind times is that when the push is on you get more safety incidents happening on the jobsites. Some principal

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CHRIS DENNIS

SHEET 2

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Witness

Monday, 12 January 2004

contractors are better than others in managing health and safety on their projects and unfortunately if they can, will push the responsibility onto contractors such as ours to be responsible which we are, for health and safety but take more responsibility which should be theirs. The smaller the project the more health and safety standards reduce, which should not occur, but does.


10. The third problem is with training. It is common knowledge that it is hard to get good qualified people at the moment. For example, say for apprentices that out of 10 people we look at, only one is probably suitable. Many other training schemes have advertised heavily in recent times to attract people but unfortunately prices haven't gone up sufficiently enough for contractors in our industry to pick up the training component to train people. We do utilise group training schemes but we have many ups and downs with them. The problem we have is that we do get the numbers, but unfortunately the quality is not right and we tend to have problems with some of their workers.
11. In respect to our dealings with labour hire, to the best of my knowledge we have had either none or very little dealings with them as our policy is that you get better people and loyalty in respect of employing workers directly.
12. I do have knowledge that the CFMEUQ has made an application to lift the Building and Construction Award up to current EBA rates which they claim are the industry standards. Whilst the company I work for, Higgins supports the State Award going up and create more of a level playing field, the Master Painters Board are not currently in favour of the application.
13. I would describe my relationship with the unions as healthy and I feel very comfortable in resolving any issue with the unions and have done so since my time in Queensland. I believe that we have a healthy respect for each other and

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CHRIS DENNIS

SHEET 3

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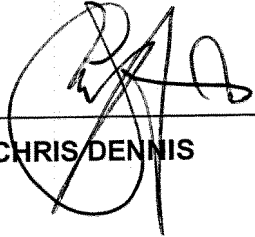
  
Witness

Monday, 12 January 2004

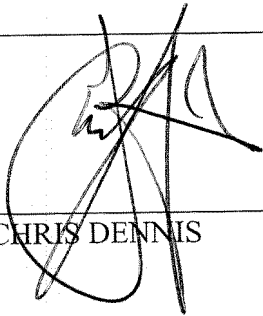
the recent EBA negotiations reflect that. When we have had to use the Industrial Relations Commission, we have been satisfied with their role and powers to resolve disputes and problems.

14. This statement is to the best of my knowledge true and correct.


Dated this 12<sup>th</sup> day of January 2004

  
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CHRIS DENNIS

WITNESS:   
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CHRIS DENNIS

SHEET 4

  
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Witness

Monday, 12 January 2004